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People's Reporter

A FORUM OF CURRENT AFFAIRS

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"People of Greenland have an inalienable right to self-determination"

World Council of Churches general secretary Rev Prof Dr Jerry Pillay has stated that the US government's stated determination to own and control Greenland is in diametric opposition to the wishes of the people of Greenland and to their political trajectory towards independence.
"It is tantamount to neocolonialism," said Dr. Pillay.

"The World Council of Churches joins with Bishop Paneeraq Siegstad Munk, head of Greenland's Evangelical Lutheran Church, in appealing to all Americans who believe in freedom, dignity, and the right of people to choose their own path, to call upon their elected representatives and their government to stand by the Greenlanders in their right to determine their own future", said Rev. Dr. Jerry Pillay.

Rev. Pillay further noted that the people of Greenland have an inalienable right to self-determination and are on a clear pathway to independence, confirmed both by their own representatives and by the Danish government.

"Their rights and views must be seriously considered and respected," said Pillay.

The US Government's stated determination to own and control Greenland is in diametric opposition to the wishes of the people of Greenland and to their political trajectory towards independence. It is tantamount to neo-colonialism.

Zion Church, perched on the edge of Disko Bay in western Greenland, built in 1779. *Photo:* Claus Grue/WCC

Bishop Paneeraq clearly states, "This is a question of human rights, dignity, and respecting international laws and treaties. We are a small people, but we are not invisible. Our future is not something to be decided over our heads. We have language, culture, ancestors, children, and a future tied to this place. We are people, not property. Greenland is not land to be bought. It is our home, and it is not for sale."

The WCC expresses its growing concern about the effects of the US Administration's recent actions in undermining respect for the principles of state sovereignty and self-determination, threatening the stability of the entire international community. We urge the US Government to reconsider its current direction in international relations and the impact thereof on the United States' standing in the community of nations.

– WCC News

Poland: Model for churches and humanitarian actors working hand in hand

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) formally concluded its World Service operations in Poland on 31 December 2025, marking almost four years of collaboration with the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland (ECACP). The LWF member church will continue providing assistance, through its diaconal programs, to hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians who fled the war at home.

"This response was never only about delivering assistance," says Allan Calma, LWF Global Humanitarian Coordinator. "It was about restoring dignity, building trust, and standing alongside people at a moment of profound loss. Together with our member church, we reached tens of thousands of refugees, strengthened communities, and built relationships that will outlast this program," he notes.

Between 2022 and 2025, the response reached tens of thousands of refugees across seven cities. Nearly 70,000 people received multipurpose cash assistance, enabling families to meet their most urgent needs with dignity while supporting local markets. More than 135,000 psychosocial support sessions were delivered, alongside education, child-safe spaces, language

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Poland: Model for churches and humanitarian actors working hand in hand

People's Reporter
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Nations without nuclear weapons have no sovereignty !

The capture of Mr. Nicholas Maduro, President of Venezuela and his wife by the US forces on 3 January 2026, through mid-night military operations at Caracas flagrantly violating international law and sovereignty of nations, is a harbinger of the latest phase of the neo-imperialist expansion project of the US. Hours after taking the President as a prisoner and chaining him, as per reports, President Trump said that his government would run Caracas, at least temporarily, and would tap its vast oil reserves. Everybody knows that, it is when the tariff war did not produce the expected economic gains that the US turned to looting the oil from Venezuela. He also announced his intention of bringing about regime changes in Mexico, Colombia, Cuba and Iran and annexation of Greenland as a territory of the US, obviously to loot resources from these countries.

Although this is the continuation of the imperialist expansion project of the US started with the overthrow of Mohammad Mosaddegh, Prime Minister of Iran in 1953 and assassination of Patrice Lumumba, President of Congo in 1961, this intervention in Venezuela by President Trump is terribly frightening. What is more unfortunate is that, while all the previous assassinations of heads of states and coups invited strong condemnations by governments and the general public across the world, this time, only a few governments dared to condemn this illegal and brazen intervention in a country; and that too not in strong words! This is because, all states without nuclear weapons are afraid of displeasing the US. Among the nuclear states, only North Korea condemned the aggression in strong words. Russia and China used less strong words. It appears that even these powerful nuclear states are cautious about confrontation with the US. Venezuela's growing trade relation with China is one of the reasons that angered the US. Therefore, China ought to have come in support of her trade partner. One has to assume that China might have avoided a strong protest with the intention of executing such an operation in Taiwan! The capture of the President of Venezuela under chain on the one hand, and silence or passive response by the nations and people across the world on violating the sovereignty of a country on the other, create a situation of all nations submitting themselves before the imperial power of the US out of fear. Even the heads of states are afraid of their security. Under such a scenario, military intervention in any state is a cake-walk for the US. Whereas people across the world until the recent past, used to raise their voice against any unjust and illegal acts by any power within the nations or outside; today, many people come out in support of the US and others feel numb. World conscience remaining anesthetised by an imperial power is the biggest calamity human civilisation faces today.

Sovereignty is the essential requirement for nations. Internal authority – exclusive right to govern within its borders, external autonomy – freedom from external interference in its domestic affairs as enshrined in the UN charters, and sovereign equality – all states, big or small are considered equal under international law; are the key aspects of sovereignty. The capture of President Maduro and making him a prisoner in the US raises threat to the sovereignty of all nations without nuclear weapons. This is a sad plight in the history of humanity.

Thought for the Fortnight

You can bomb the world into pieces,
but you can't bomb it into peace.

– Michael Franti

A Gospel Reflection for 2026

Blessed are the Peacemakers

Arun Sam Amirtham

Christ enters history not as a conqueror, but as a child.
He reigns not through domination, but through love stronger than death.
He calls us not to withdraw, but to bear witness.
And so the final word over this wounded world — over Venezuela, Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan, detention centres, refugee camps, and grieving homes — is not despair.
The final word is the promise:
***"Behold, I am making all things new."* (Revelation 21:5)**

We step into 2026 beneath a gathering global storm.

Across the world, law, compassion and restraint seem increasingly fragile. We hear of military intervention and abduction in Venezuela; of immigrants and asylum-seekers treated as security threats rather than neighbours in the USA; of Gaza shattered and humanitarian relief breaking down; of Ukraine still bleeding; of Sudan suffering in near-silence; of Christians, Muslims, Dalits, tribal peoples and ethnic minorities attacked in India, Bangladesh, Nigeria and elsewhere.

Everywhere the story seems the same: the strong do what they can, and the weak endure what they must.

And we who confess the name of Christ must ask:

What is the Gospel in such a world?

Not the sentimental gospel that comforts without challenging.

Not the privatised gospel of personal salvation detached from public witness.

Not the partisan gospel that baptises our preferred powers or ideologies.

But the Gospel of Jesus Christ:

the One born into an occupied land, numbered among refugees, crucified by an Empire, and raised by God as Lord of history.

Naming Sin — Including the Sin of Nations

The Scriptures never treat power as morally neutral. The prophets speak directly to the rulers and systems:

***"Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees."* (Isaiah 10:1)**

So when states abduct leaders outside the rule of law, when migrants are rounded up and families torn apart, when cities are bombed and

Mr. Arun Sam Amirtham is a social entrepreneur engaged in grassroot sustainable development, and a lay theologian engaged in questions of political theology, economic justice, business ethics, and contextual theology, with particular attention to emerging technologies and care for creation.

humanitarian aid obstructed, when militias and armies slaughter villages, when minorities are scapegoated and terrorised,

These are not simply "policy decisions." They are sins against God and neighbour.

And the Church must not avert its eyes — nor remain silent when "our side" does wrong. Moral clarity cannot be selective. **Christian faithfulness demands truth without fear or favour.**

Defending Human Dignity

From Genesis to Revelation, the Scriptures proclaim that every person bears the image of God. Dignity is not granted by citizenship, ethnicity or religion. It is not erased by poverty, migration status, or accusation.

Jesus identifies Himself with "the least of these" — the hungry, the stranger, the prisoner, the displaced (Matthew 25). **To dehumanise others is to wound Christ.**

So we must refuse language that reduces people to labels — *illegals*, *collateral damage*, *threats*, *vermin*, or *enemies*. Dehumanisation is the seedbed of atrocity.

A Kingdom That Judges the Nations

Christians do not place ultimate hope in empires, markets, militaries or international institutions — though we may work for reform within them. Our hope rests in **a crucified and risen King who will judge injustice and wipe away every tear.**

This is not escapism. It is accountability.

It reminds us that **violence is not the final word and no leader, army or system escapes the gaze of God.** History belongs not to the powerful, but to the Lamb.

A Call to Repent — and to Resist the Powers

The Church is not called to neutrality in the face of suffering. Silence is rarely peacemaking; it often becomes complicity.

We must repent: for indifference, for nationalism disguised as faith, for theologies that bless domination, for reducing the Gospel to personal comfort, for ignoring refugees, minorities and the poor, and for allowing our hearts to be discipled more by media outrage than by the Sermon on the Mount.

And then we are called to resist — not with hatred or violence, but with the practices of the Kingdom: truth-telling, justice-seeking, hospitality, generosity and persistent prayer.

What Might Christians Resolve in 2026?

As an ecumenical community, we may not always agree on political analysis. But we can unite around the call of Christ.

Let us resolve:

To tell the truth even when it costs us, and even when it challenges our own communities or nations.

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Attitude of the Political Zionists and its backfire on the credibility of the First Testament

Solomon Victus

Introduction: From the very beginning of the history of Christianity, Jesus Christ and his followers were understood in the Jewish perception as an undesirable entity. So also it happened later with the birth of Islam and its adherents. Fortunately or unfortunately both Christians and Muslims keep the fundamentals of the Jewish scriptures as part of their sacred texts. Therefore the followers of all three are in general called descendants of the Abrahamic religion, and are addressed as the People of the Book. Now the question is, can these religions and their scriptures get due credibility from the people who follow the teachings, or does the scripture itself have the natural potential to prove that it is the sacred text? As far as my understanding goes, the credibility of the scriptures can be strengthened only because of their practising capability.

The recent events and discussions which have taken place around the world, especially among a section of the Jewish community who play a major role, the Zionists, give a different picture about the Torah and Judaism. This has created bewilderment not only among the Christians and Muslims but also among the Jews, particularly the Orthodox as well as the secular Jews. Modern Israelis claim that Zionism is part and parcel of Judaism whereas the many senior Rabbis, especially those from the Orthodox background and those who experienced the Nazi Holocaust, categorically reject their allegiance to political Zionism. The majority of the diaspora Jews as well as secular forces around the globe have understood that political Zionism is a political gimmick by the politically motivated Zionists.

Anti-Zionist Stance of Radical and Orthodox Rabbis: Many Rabbis distinguish them rightly by saying "Judaism is a religion, but Zionism is nationalism." A Jewish Rabbi in an interview admits, "Zionism is really the biggest enemy of Judaism … Judaism is a religion. That means God gave the Torah in the Mount Sinai 3500 years ago. What united them? Not a country not a language: our nation is a nation only by the Torah. If you believe in the 13 principles of Judaism you are a Jew, if not, you are not a Jew: you can be a Jew, a Japanese, a Chinese, a black, a white, no difference. Zionism on the other hand is a completely secular movement: it was born by a person called Theodor Herzl from Vienna, Austria. They don't keep [the commandments], they don't believe in God, they don't believe in the Torah. Herzl himself didn't believe even in circumcision for his son. They keep the name Judaism, emptying out the holiness, the belief, the religion, filling that in with nationalistic ideas – you don't have to be a believer, you don't have to keep the Torah. Zionism is really the biggest enemy of Judaism."[1]

The freedom of an ethnic race in search of a place of peace and prosperity is the crux of the theme of the First Testament. It is not a blueprint for perpetrating violence and aggression by any race on this earth.

An American Rabbi said rather worryingly, "Zionists are working day and night to merge the identity of Judaism and Zionism into one. They need Jews to be responsible for their actions or else they cannot use anti-Semitism as a shield. They will always say it's about all the Jewish people and not Israel, to get us to pay. We see this in the streets of Europe and now also in America. It must be stopped. Zionists are working for their selfish agendas at the expense of Jewish people."[2] Another American Rabbi says, "Bibi is the enemy of the Torah even in the Holy Land. Our brothers have no association with the Israeli government even they suffer from his laws and actions. We say to you again, Israel is not our country. Bibi Netanyahu does not speak for us in any way."[3]

Most Orthodox Rabbis today blame the Zionists for the new policies of expansionism. They openly condemn the Zionists that they are not Jewish; they are against God; they have deceived God and *Hisham*; the Torah does not belong to them. Rabbi Elchonon Beck, the one who joined in the procession against

The Rev. Dr. Solomon Victus is a former Professor of Social Analysis at Tamilnadu Theological Seminary at Madurai, Tamil Nadu

the Zionists said, "It is not a religious conflict. The conflict is a conflict against the occupation and against the genocide."[4] Some people try to distinguish liberal Zionists from hardcore Zionists, but for Prof. Jason Hickel who said, "There is no such thing as 'liberal Zionism'. Zionism is rooted in ideologies and practices of colonisation, apartheid, and ethnic cleansing. It is intrinsically violent and cannot be abstracted from its violence."[5]

However, there are many modern Rabbis who still support Netanyahu's political position against Gaza. For instance, the sermon of a woman Rabbi in the Rosh Hashanah service at the Central Synagogue in New York City on Sept 24, 2025 reflects this: "The greatest lie humanity tells itself we have out grown human sacrifice. We call it by different names now and make our offering to different gods. We offer young men we call soldiers as if the designation means that their mothers cry less when they die. We call masses of humanity collateral damage and turn our eyes away from the pictures of their lifeless bodies as we sip our morning coffee, and the truth is we don't do it because we are heartless, we do it because we believe that it is necessary for the world to keep running. We do it because we believe in the God whose favour we so desperately seek: freedom, security, prosperity, flourishing. They demand blood as the price of their favour. We do it because we cannot see any other choice, and may be that why we read the *akeda*, the binding of Isaac on Rosh Hashanah, because the story of the *akeda* isn't about inconceivable obedience. When Abraham prepares to sacrifice Isaac he is just accepting the same bargain of blood, but we still accept today that some need to die for the world to flourish."[6]

Superiority Complex in an Inter-religious Context: Religious claims such as that the Jews are "the chosen people" could be so far possible in the past periods, but the entire world is now moving inevitably towards a new era of liberty, equality and fraternity. Therefore exclusive religious claims like "chosen race and chosen land" on any one sect will have to undergo acid tests before there can be a fair rational understanding of the global community. Jews are not the only Semitic people as they claim today. Jews aren't the only Semites; Arabs across the Middle East and North Africa, Egyptians, Iraqis, Saudis, Palestinians, Syrians, Jordanians, Lebanese, Algerians, Moroccans all belong to the Semitic family of people. And yet when someone says anti-Semitic, none of them are included. The word excludes the very people it linguistically describes.[7]

The Zionist government continuously uses biblical names for their IDF operations to justify their strong allegiance with Judaism. For instance, the Zionist state of Israel was using biblical names such as "Operation Gideon's Chariots" for the latest operation to destroy entire Gaza and annihilate Palestinians. To make war against Iran they used the image of biblical text and called "Operation Rising Lion" (Numbers 23:24). Is it not a "Holy War or Jihad" as understood by the religious terrorists? As a pastor and social analyst, I have had some problems recently in using the First Testament (FT) texts in exclusive ways and straitjacket manner with the question, What kind of perspective do we Indian Christians hold on this FT at this critical situation in Gaza?

What sort of understanding do we still cherish with our biblical scriptures especially with FT? Are we still following the scriptural understanding of the ancient Israelites or are we persuaded by the scriptural understanding of the Zionist ultra-nationalists? The freedom of an ethnic race in search of a place of peace and prosperity is the crux of the theme of the FT. It is not a blueprint for perpetrating violence and aggression by any race on this earth.

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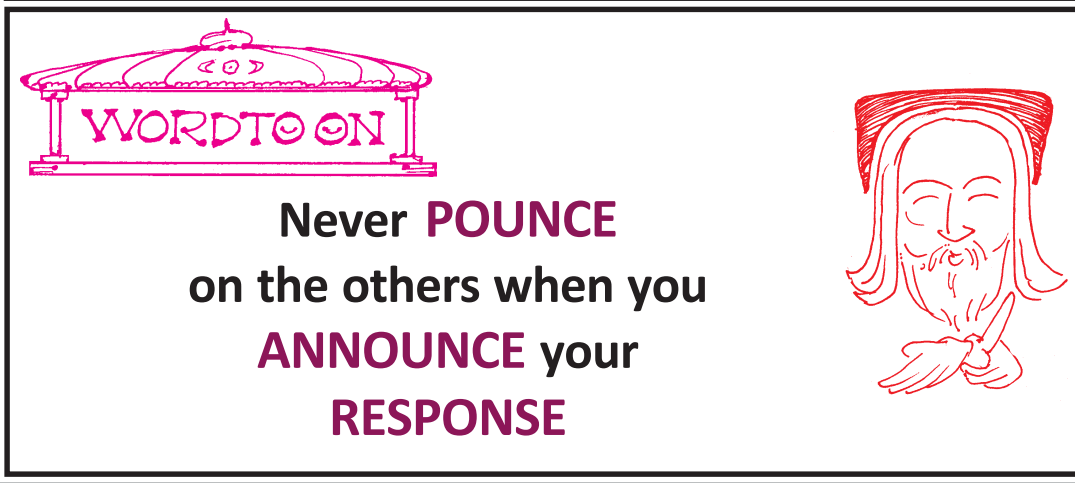

Footnotes

[1] https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1ERgLdE6SQ accessed on 27/09/25.

[2] http://www.facebook.com/share/v/1H1BD5sfkH/ accessed on 24/10/25

[3] http://www.facebook.com/share/v/1H1BD5sfkH/ accessed on 24/10/25

[4] http://www.facebook.com/share/r/1Fr54MmNuy/ accessed on 24/10/25

[5] https://www.facebook.com/share/p/176unMJt4/ accessed on 17/10/25

[6] https://www.facebook.com/share/v/177sx9yjzS/ accessed on 20/10/25

[7] https://www.facebook.com/share/r//19GHCtf8Jh/ accessed on 26/06/25

To be continued

Text of an Interview

'Justice is the core': A manifesto for the future of Serampore

At a time of changes in India's socio-political landscape,
the Senate of Serampore College has a new leader. Rev. Dr. David Joy, currently the Principal of the Kerala United Theological College, Trivandrum outlines a radical roadmap for the "wellspring of Indian theology".
In an interview with Mr. Shibu Itty Kuttickal,
he moves beyond traditional dogma, and calls for a "theology of the neighbourhood" that tethers faith to the urgent, modern cries for social justice.

Rev. Dr. Joy articulated a vision where the "ecumenical anchor" of Serampore, the cradle of Indian theology, must now tether itself to the urgent cries for social justice. For him, the mission is clear: "I would assert that justice is the core. Terms like peace, liberation, and salvation gain relevance only when there is justice." This is no small claim, coming from the leader of an institution that holds a unique place in global Christianity—operating under a Danish Charter of 1827 and the Bengal Act of 1918 that grants it the singular authority to navigate both its sacred and secular history.

Amidst the rhythmic rehearsals of Christmas carols on a December evening at the Kerala United Theological Seminary in Thiruvananthapuram, I sat down with Rev. Dr. David Joy, who assumed charge as the President of the Senate of Serampore College, in November.

The interview setting was symbolic: A community in training for a message of hope. As only the third KUTS Principal to ascend to the presidency of the Senate, after the late Rev. Dr. Jacob Varghese and the Rt. Rev. Dr. J. W. Gladstone, his leadership arrives at a critical juncture. It is a moment when the traditional ground of Indian secularism is trembling, leaving the faithful to navigate an increasingly unstable and insecure landscape.

Rev. Dr. David Joy
is the new President of the Senate of Serampore College.
He is the Principal of
the Kerala United Theological Seminary,
Thiruvanathapuram

In our exchange, Dr Joy articulated a vision where the "ecumenical anchor" of Serampore, the cradle of Indian theology, must now tether itself to the urgent cries for social justice.

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From missionary tracts to national pulse

Dr. Joy reminds us that Serampore was the bridge for non-Catholic denominations during the transition to the National Movement. Under leaders like Bishop V.S. Azariah and the influence of the 1910 Edinburgh Conference, the Institution evolved from translating tracts to engaging with Indian nationalism. **"The Senate reflected the freedom struggle by incorporating its elements into the curriculum," Dr. Joy explains. This legacy is the bedrock upon which he intends to build a grounded response to the local context.**

Today, with 76 affiliated colleges and 6,000 students, the Senate faces a landscape crowded with over 3,000 independent "Bible Colleges." Dr Joy is firm on maintaining rigour. While many such colleges act as intermediaries for funds, Serampore remains committed to serious research. He aims to build bridges with academic institutions like the South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies (SAIACS) in Bangalore, ensuring that Indian theology remains an intellectual heavyweight, not just a missionary exercise.

Theology of the soil and the subaltern

This commitment to the "local" is most visible when theology meets the soil. Dr Joy highlights the work of Dr Wati Longchar, who argues that the primary resource for spirituality is the "land" itself. This is not abstract environmentalism; it is a theology born of belonging. He points to the 2003 Muthanga struggle in Kerala — where Adivasi communities faced violence while demanding their land — as a moment where theology moved with grassroots resistance.

In this view, issues of water, air, and displacement are theological mandates. This shift focuses heavily on marginalised experiences, tracing a lineage from the foundational Church-Society dialogues of Dr. M. M. Thomas to the more radical Indian Dalit Theology. Dr. Joy cites Dr. Arvind P Nirmal's 1981 lecture, *Towards a Shudra Theology*, as a definitive moment of *thanima* — the reclaiming of an indigenous soul for the oppressed.

Reclaiming voices and the 'womanist' turn

The "tenor" of education is shifting through the presence of women, who now constitute one-third of Serampore students and 40% of faculty. **Dr. Joy is vocal about the need for an "Indian womanist theology" that addresses the overlapping burdens of caste and gender.** To illustrate this, he points to the profound ministerial impact of leaders like Rev. Florence Deenadayalan and Rev. Jessie Ranjan.

Dr. Joy believes these women have fundamentally redefined the "ministerial touch" through their resilience and local engagement. Rev. Florence Deenadayalan, a pioneer in the C.S.I. Madras Diocese, demonstrated the power of a "theology of the neighbourhood" through her long and influential service at the Wesley English Church. Her leadership proved that women could effectively shepherd large, traditional congregations while maintaining a prophetic, inclusive voice.

Similarly, he recalls the radical vocation of Rev. Jessie Ranjan, who insisted on officiating services even while undergoing debilitating chemotherapy. For Dr Joy, the dedication of both Rev. Florence and Rev. Jessie proves that women often possess a superior ministerial capacity because they have navigated and dismantled hierarchies to reach the pulpit. **He expects church leadership to reflect this academic and pastoral reality in the next two decades.**

The neighbourhood as a prophetic sentinel

Dr. Joy's emphasis on the "neighbourhood" further grounds this vision. He argues that focus must shift from formal inter-faith dialogue to the material relationships we maintain with those living alongside us. In a sharp critique of the current climate, he identifies fear and hate as the primary tools of fascism. "Fascists inject fear, which eventually becomes hate," he observes. **He calls on the Church to avoid religious animosity at all costs.**

Instead, he highlights "Commensality" — a term coined by the late Rev. Dr. K. C. Abraham to describe a prophetic unity found in the shared table rather than institutional committees. Dr. Joy credits KC with pioneering an "eco-theology" that integrated justice with the environment. **Following this lead, Dr Joy urges pastors to step away from administrative "hassles" of power and plunge into the lives of the people, citing, among others, the ministry of Rev Vincent Rajkumar among sex workers in Bangalore.**

Curriculum reform; radical hospitality

As he takes charge, Dr. Joy is overseeing a decade-defining revision of the curriculum. The Bachelor of Divinity (BD) will be streamlined to three years to make it more contemporary, aiming for broader recognition by integrating public theology. **For Dr. Joy, the goal is "Christian formation" — ensuring that graduates possess the critical ability to interpret the Bible contextually in their own local settings. He views the Senate not merely as an examining body, but as the central institution holding the diverse Indian churches together today.**

Mr. Shibu Itty Kuttickal is a senior business journalist with over 30 years of experience. He currently serves as a senior correspondent based in India for a Turkey-based international price reporting agency, specialising in Asian markets. He also contributes regularly to ecumenical publications in India.

This inclusive spirit is mirrored in his plan to establish an "Ivanios House" at Serampore to honour the late Bishop Geevarghese Mar Ivanios. This gesture carries deep historical weight, as Bishop Ivanios taught at Serampore as a professor between 1913 and 1919 while serving as an Orthodox priest. Later, the bishop played a pivotal role in the 1930 "Reunion Movement" that ultimately led to the formation of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church.

By honouring him, Dr Joy perhaps seeks to bridge the gap between the Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant traditions. He is calling the Church to return to the "wells" of Indian thought while addressing the "desert" of modern inequality. ●

Climate & Biodiversity at the Heart of the Ecumenical Decade of Climate Justice Action (2025 – 2035)

When Faith Listens to a Groaning Planet

Mathew Koshy Punnackadu

***"The earth dries up and withers; the world languishes and withers."*(Isaiah 24:4). These ancient prophetic words sound uncannily like a present-day climate bulletin. Floods and droughts, collapsing ecosystems, poisoned rivers, rising seas, and vanishing species are no longer distant threats. They shape everyday life — most painfully for the poor, Indigenous peoples, small farmers, fisherfolk, and fragile ecosystems.**

What humanity confronts today is not a single environmental crisis, but a convergence of injustices — rooted in extractive economies, fossil-fuel dependency, and development models that sacrifice life for profit.

Recognising the gravity of this moment, the World Council of Churches (WCC) has declared Climate and Biodiversity as the thematic focus for 2026, within its Ecumenical Decade of Climate Justice Action (2025–2035). This is not merely an environmental campaign; it is a call to spiritual awakening, ethical resistance, and public witness.

One Crisis, Many Wounds

Climate breakdown and biodiversity loss are inseparable realities. Rising temperatures destroy habitats; deforestation accelerates climate change; ocean warming devastates coral reefs; and industrial agriculture depletes soil and water. Together, these forces unravel the web of life.

Yet the burden is profoundly unequal. Those least responsible for the crisis suffer the most. Small island nations face an existential threat. Indigenous communities lose ancestral lands. Poor households experience displacement, hunger, and disease. At the same time, countless non-human species disappear silently, without recognition or mourning.

The Bible presents creation not as a backdrop for human history, but as a living community cherished by God. Every creature has intrinsic worth — not because it serves human needs, but because it belongs to God (Genesis 1; Psalm 104; Job 38–41).

For this reason, the WCC frames climate change and biodiversity loss not merely as scientific or technical challenges, but as **matters of justice**. The cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor are one and the same.

A Biblical Vision Beyond Exploitation

The Bible presents creation not as a backdrop for human history, but as a living community cherished by God. Every creature has intrinsic worth — not because it serves human needs, but because it belongs to God (Genesis 1; Psalm 104; Job 38–41).

Scripture speaks of creation praising God (Psalm 148), groaning in pain (Romans 8), and yearning for renewal. Biodiversity loss, therefore, is not only an ecological tragedy; it is a **spiritual impoverishment**. When species vanish, humanity loses teachers of wisdom, humility, and balance (Job 12:7–10).

The 2026 thematic year intentionally moves beyond hierarchical notions of "stewardship" toward a more relational vision: **sacred partnership, mutual custodianship, and co-creatorship**. Humans are not masters standing above creation; we are participants within it.

Justice for the Vulnerable — Human and More-than-Human

Climate disasters are not morally neutral. Floods, droughts, wildfires, and heatwaves follow lines of inequality, exposing systems that privilege consumption over care and profit over life.

Dr. Mathew Koshy Punnackadu is presently the Commissioner, Climate Justice and Sustainable Development of the World Council of Churches. Dr. Mathew Koshy Punnackadu is the Project Director of the CSI Community Development Programme.

The biblical God consistently sides with the vulnerable—widows, orphans, strangers—and, by extension, wounded lands and endangered species. Faithfulness in our time, therefore, demands **solidarity with frontline communities** and resistance against structures that normalise ecological destruction.

Listening to Indigenous Wisdom

Indigenous peoples are among the most affected by climate and biodiversity loss, yet they are also bearers of profound ecological wisdom shaped by generations of intimate relationship with land, water, forests, and animals.

Their traditions of restraint, reciprocity, and reverence challenge dominant development models built on endless growth. The Church is called not to romanticise Indigenous knowledge, but to **listen humbly, learn deeply, and walk in solidarity**.

From Exploitation to Ecological Reparations

The climate and biodiversity crisis is rooted in historical injustice. Industrialised nations have benefited from centuries of extraction, while the costs are borne disproportionately by others. Justice, therefore, requires more than adaptation; it requires **ecological reparations**.

The WCC calls for fossil-fuel divestment, loss-and-damage mechanisms, climate finance for frontline communities, and reparative justice for Indigenous peoples and Small Island Developing States. This is not charity — it is responsibility.

From Global Call to Local Commitment: The CSI Monthly Programme for 2026

While the global vision is articulated by the WCC, the **month-by-month Climate and Biodiversity Programme for 2026** has been intentionally designed by the **Church of South India** (CSI).

This is not a generic action plan. It is a **deliberate theological initiative**, rooted in Scripture, aimed at inspiring ecological engagement through biblical reflection. Each month connects a specific biblical text with lived ecological realities, enabling congregations to move from Bible study to biodiversity care and climate justice action. Ecological responsibility here flows naturally from faith, worship, and discipleship.

Grassroots Innovation: Climate Action Groups in Madhya Kerala Diocese

Taking this vision a decisive step further, the **CSI Madhya Kerala Diocese** has constituted **12 Climate Action Groups**, affirming that climate justice must be rooted not merely in declarations, but in grassroots participation.

Each group includes:One representative from each parish, andthe local parish vicar, ensuring shared lay–pastoral leadership.

Each group coordinates **25 – 30 parishes**, guiding implementation, contextual action, mutual learning, and accountability. This decentralised model transforms climate concern into a **lived parish movement**, embedding climate and biodiversity justice into worship, mission, and everyday church life.

A Living Witness of Hope

"Faith without works is dead." — James 2:26

The CSI programme for 2026 calls the Church to embody a living faith—one that listens to creation's groaning and responds with courage, compassion, and action.

Hope here is not passive optimism. It is participation. It is the deliberate choice to stand with a wounded Earth, resist systems of destruction, and nurture life wherever possible.

As creation groans, the Church is called not to look away—but to listen, and to act.

Climate breakdown and biodiversity loss are inseparable realities. Rising temperatures destroy habitats; deforestation accelerates climate change; ocean warming devastates coral reefs; and industrial agriculture depletes soil and water. Together, these forces unravel the web of life.

A Gospel Reflection for 2026

Blessed are the Peacemakers

>>> Contd. from Page 2 Col. 4

To defend the image of God in every person Palestinian and Israeli, Venezuelan and American, Sudanese and Ukrainian, Hindu and Muslim, Christian and atheist, migrant and citizen.

To practise hospitality not as charity from the powerful to the weak, but as recognition that Christ meets us in the stranger.

To seek peace with justice and refuse to bless violence as inevitable or righteous.

To support those who suffer through giving, advocacy, accompaniment, and strengthening local churches and relief organisations.

To reject dehumanising speech in our homes, pulpits, social media, and public life.

To pray persistently for peace not as a last resort, but as an act of faith that God is still at work.

To disciple our communities in the way of the cross so that following Jesus means more than cultural identity — it means cruciform love.

To stand with the persecuted and marginalised because Christ stands with them.

The Hope We Carry

Christ enters history not as a conqueror, but as a child. He reigns not through domination, but through love stronger than death. He calls us not to withdraw, but to bear witness.

And so the final word over this wounded world — over Venezuela, Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan, detention centres, refugee camps, and grieving homes — is not despair.

The final word is the promise:

***"Behold, I am making all things new."* (Revelation 21:5)**

Until that day, may the Church — across nations, denominations and traditions — live as people of the Kingdom:

Peacemakers
in a warring world.
Truth-tellers
in the midst of fake news.
Neighbours
when ethnic prejudices
prevail.
Servants
where self-righteousness and
ego are normalised.
Pilgrims of hope
in a fearful world.

Young People's Column

When One Voice Seeks to Become the Only Voice: Babel, Plurality, and Neo – Nationalism

Samji Roy

**Pentecost is not the restoration of one tongue,
but the creation of listening hearts.
True unity doesn't come from building towers or enforced sameness;
it arises from crossing boundaries and listening deeply.**

There are moments in history when ancient texts return with unsettling clarity. Genesis 11:1–9, the Tower of Babel narrative, is one such text for our time. Often seen as a moral lesson against human arrogance or an explanation for linguistic diversity, Babel is rarely viewed as a political text that reveals the dangers of enforced uniformity and control. In contemporary India, "unity" is increasingly understood as sameness: one nation, one culture, one language, one history. Diversity, once celebrated as a source of strength, is now viewed as disorder or even a threat. The rising incidents of violence against minorities highlight this change. Read in this context, Babel becomes not a story of divine punishment, but a warning against the politics of control and uniformity.

The Promise – and Threat – of "One Language"

The story begins with a seemingly peaceful scene: "Now the whole earth had one language and the same words" (Gen 11:1). At first glance, this seems perfect. There are no misunderstandings, no need for translation, and no conflict. However, history shows us that when those in power talk about "one language," it usually means more than just communication. It points to one official way of defining reality and one accepted identity. Political theorist James C. Scott refers to this as the *public transcript* – the official narrative that power tells about itself. Babel's public transcript is striking: oneness means strength, sameness means security, and difference means danger. Here, linguistic uniformity signals more than communicative convenience; it implies administrative efficiency and control. The builders fear only one thing: dispersion. **"Otherwise, we shall be scattered" (Gen 11:4), they say, revealing that their unity is fuelled by anxiety, not joy.** In today's India, similar anxieties surface whenever diversity refuses to be silenced. Linguistic variety, differing histories, and minority religions are only tolerated so long as they do not interrupt the dominant narrative. **Babel reminds us that this fear-driven unity is already a form of violence.**

Cities, Towers, and the Politics of Memory

"Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens" (Gen 11:4). Cities and towers are never neutral. They are visible declarations of power inscribed in brick and mortar. To "make a name" (Gen 11:4) means to shape history, control memory and decide who belongs within the city's walls and who remains outside. Babel represents a political theology that prioritizes system over vocation. **Instead of obeying the divine call to "fill the earth" (Gen 1:28; 9:1), humanity chooses settlement, concentration, and control. What looks like progress in the public transcript is actually a refusal of God's broader vision.**

Rev. Samji Roy is the Director of Metropolitan Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Centre for Holistic Development, Chennai and the Assistant Vicar, Jerusalem Mar Thoma Syrian Church, Anna Nagar

God Comes Down: The Hidden Transcript

The story takes an ironic turn: "The LORD came down to see the city and the tower" (Gen 11:5). **The tower meant to reach heaven is so insignificant that God must come down to notice it.** This irony punctures the exaggeration found in imperial propaganda. Here emerges what James Scott would call the *hidden transcript*, which undermines the grand claims with humour. Underneath the claims of permanence and greatness lies a counter-narrative of fragility and exaggeration. The biblical text challenges the idea that monumental power should be taken at face value. Equally important is what the text omits. The builders are unnamed, labourers don't speak, and no bodies are visible. Big projects, whether ancient or modern, rely on unseen labourers. Roads, statues, cities, and symbols are built on unrecognized effort. The scripture's refusal to romanticize this labour acts as a form of resistance. **The hidden transcript reveals what the public transcript tries to hide: unity built on silence is never innocent.** God's concern – "This is only the beginning of what they will do" (Gen 11:6) – is not about creativity but about unchecked centralization that blocks alternative futures.

Confusion as Mercy, Scattering as Liberation

God's response, the confusion of languages, is often seen as punishment. However, it may be better understood as mercy. A single language had become dangerous, enabling uniform thought and total control. By multiplying languages, God breaks down the structures of domination and restores diversity. Scattering redistributes power, reopens space for differences, and preserves human dignity. What the builders feared becomes the means of liberation.

Babel and the Indian Present

India stands today at a Babel-like crossroads. One path offers unity through uniformity, with a single history backed by monuments, renaming, slogans, and selective memory. The other embraces unity through diversity, with all its challenges and richness. Genesis 11 provides a theological critique of the first path. It shows that when unity demands silence, God intervenes. When one voice seeks to become the only voice, God introduces many. **For Christians in India, numerically small and politically vulnerable, Babel offers both warning and hope. It warns against baptizing nationalism with theology and offers hope that God's plans are not aligned with the loudest voices, but with the preservation of differences.**

Choosing Plurality

The Bible does not end at Babel. At Pentecost (Acts 2), the Spirit descends again – not to erase languages, but to make them mutually intelligible. **Pentecost is not the restoration of one tongue, but the creation of listening hearts. True unity doesn't come from building towers or enforced sameness; it arises from crossing boundaries and listening deeply.** Babel leaves every generation with a choice: the comfort of uniformity or the courage of plurality. **Genesis 11 asserts that when unity becomes domination, God disrupts it. The God of the Bible is not the guardian of one voice, one culture, or one memory.** God moves ahead of migrants, speaks in many tongues, and refuses to dwell in monuments built on fear. Babel is ultimately not about God confusing humanity, but about God refusing to allow one voice to be the only voice. **In a world tempted by narrow walls and afraid of open horizons, Babel declares that justice begins with many voices. Faith, at its bravest, is found not in building higher towers, but in learning to live, listen, and hope among strangers.** ●

Choices, Conversations, Community:

Faith in the age of Algorithms

S. A. Angel Merlin

**In a world that allures us into hate and violence subtly encoded in our digital space,
Christ invites the Church to shape communities where listening matters, humility is prized,
and dialogue becomes a sacrament of reconciling presence. In Christ's body, people are not consumers
- they are beloved members. The logic of the kingdom subverts market reductionism;
the "least" are prized, the oppressed are heard, and relationship, not transaction, defines identity.**

In the fullness of creation, humanity was gifted with the freedom to choose, called into meaningful conversation, and invited into a community that reflects the Triune life of God. Yet today, these pillars of embodied faith are under profound strain. At a moment when people are more connected than ever before, many find themselves paradoxically isolated - living in digital silos, shaped by unseen algorithms and economic systems that quietly bend our choices, shape our conversations, and fracture our community.

I. Choices in the Age of Digital Dominion

"Choose" is the word that saturates our technological world today. From the apps we open to the media we consume, our screens present endless choices. Yet the freedom to choose has become a carefully engineered illusion. In many settings, especially among younger congregants, worship and fellowship are increasingly mediated by screens. Sunday gatherings, once intimate and embodied, now co-exist with hybrid attendance, chat threads, and recorded sermons. This digital turn has expanded access, but it has also reduced fellowship to individual engagement. Side by side in pews, people swipe on phones; social grins and casual chats seem less relevant.

Ms. S. A. Angel Merlin, currently pursues M.Th studies (Christian Theology) in Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, Chennai

The algorithms behind this digital ecosystem are appalling. We have learnt - what we like, what we ignore,what keeps us engaged and even what enrages us. These invisible architectures influence our choices in subtle yet potent ways. They reward outrage over curiosity, division over nuance, and entertainment over deep reflection. Congregations can easily become fragmented subcultures - each person inhabiting a curated reality that looks like freedom but feels like isolation.

II. Conversations: Distorted and Divided

Authentic conversation - where we speak truth in love and listen with humility - is the soil out of which community grows. But in our public and private spheres, conversations are under siege. We navigate echo chambers, polarized dialogues, and data-driven manipulation aimed at reinforcing biases. Our tongues are shaped not by grace, but by provocation.

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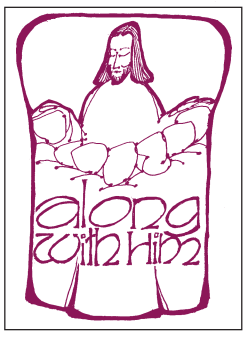

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The greatest commandment – 1

Combining the two commandments for the first time

Mammen Varkey

"And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all? Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these." ……And after that no one dared to ask him any question." Mark 12: 28-34 (RSV)

We are reflecting on one of the most familiar teachings of our Master but it is a teaching which we prove, with our deeds, that it is the least familiar or acceptable.

One who is not far from the Kingdom

A scribe went to Jesus, much impressed with the Master's answer to the Sadducees. In the Matthew's and Luke's narratives, the scribe is described as one with doubtful motives. In fact, according to them, he went **to Jesus 'to entrap'.** Mark 12: 13. But in Mark, no sign of hostility to Jesus was shown by the scribe. In fact, Jesus appreciated his 'wisdom' and said, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God". To some Biblical scholars it is an indication that all Pharisees were not 'antagonistic' to Jesus and that there were a few Pharisees who appreciated his teachings and healings.

No greater or lesser commandment

Many rabbis were of the opinion that there were 'no greater or lesser commandment'. All commandments were of equal value and importance. But it is recorded that Hillel (ca 20 B.C.) summed up the law for a gentile inquirer thus: "What you would not have done to yourself, do not do to your neighbor: that is the Whole Torah, and all the rest is commentary". (B. Sabbath 31.A)

The foundation of monotheism

In a way, there was no doubt about the greatest commandment. The Jews re-affirmed every day, "The Lord our God is one LORD; and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might". The Law commands, *"And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall write them as door posts of your house and on your gates. "Deut. 6: 4-9. It was this unequivocal affirmation that laid the unshakeable foundation for their monotheism.*

The Golden Rule

Actually, this is the 'Golden Rule' way. The Rule says, "……you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord". Lev. 19: 18. Later, it was described as the greatest principle in the Torah.

The most significant thing about Jesus' answer is that he combined the two, perhaps for the first time. "……there appears to be no evidence for the combination of the two texts by any teacher before the time of Jesus". (Peake's Commentary. p 813), "……it was probably Jesus who first combined the two "great commandments" of Deut. 6:4 and Lev. 19:18b into a summary of the law; there is no trace of any earlier teacher's having done so, though Philo comes close to it." (Interpreter's Bible Vol. 7 p. 847). ●

To be continued

LAMP UNTO THE FEET, LIGHT UNTO THE PATH

The Word Of God: The Light House That Should Direct Our Lives

A. V. Itty

1 Thess. 2: 9-13

"When we brought you God's message, you heard it and accepted it, not as man's message but as God's message, which indeed it is. For God is at work in you who believe" (v.13).

It was a very dark night. Standing on the upper deck of the ship he travelled, Dr. F.B. Mayor, one of the passengers, asked the ship's Captain: "How do you see Port Holywood in such a dark night?" The Captain replied: "See, there are three light houses. When those three light houses are lit together, there is no difficulty in seeing the port clearly". **In our worldly journeys full of darkness, we can recognise the port of God's will, with the help of the light houses called the Word of God.**

The Apostle is talking about that in the Scripture portion that we meditate upon. God often talks to our inner beings and we call it "internal inspiration". It is, when we examine it in the light of the word of God, that we recognise, whether our internal inspiration has originally come from God.

It is possible that the desires and interests in our sub-concscious mind might masquerade as our internal inspiration. But if our interal inspiration and the word of God reconcile, then we can make sure that our internal inspiration has

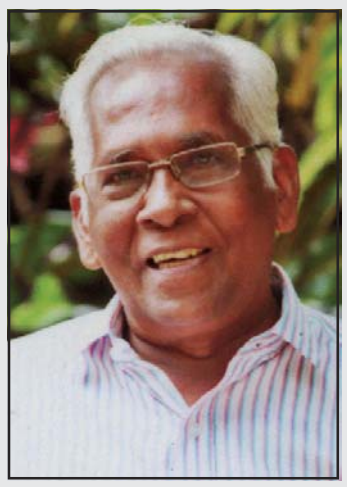
come from the Spirit of God. However, even when there is no internal inspiration, the word of God should be and must be taken as the lamp to guide us and the light to brighten our paths.

If the word of God has to be our guide, we need to study the word of God. The reformist Churches at one time started the Conventions as a means for teaching and learning the word of God. It is to be examined, if that purpose is fulfilled by our Conventions today. **However, many tools such as the Commentaries and Daily Devotions and Scripture Lessons are available today to help us learn the word of God in our lives. But unfortunately, the number of those who make use of them are very scarce. May we be able to do that.**

May God help.

Food For Thought:

Those who walk in the light of the word of God will never falter!



Prof. A. V. Itty, former Professor of English at Bishop Moore College, Mavelikara, is, now, engaged in the Evangelical, and Educational Ministry undertaken by ADORE in the Rayagada Dist. of Odisha. 94950 17850 (Mob)

Choices, Conversations, Community: Faith in the age of Algorithms

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Much of the digital conversation economy operates on amplifying extremes. Civil discourse gives way to sound bites. Opinions are monetized. Compassion is optional. We have become both consumers and commodities.

III. Scrolling Community on the run

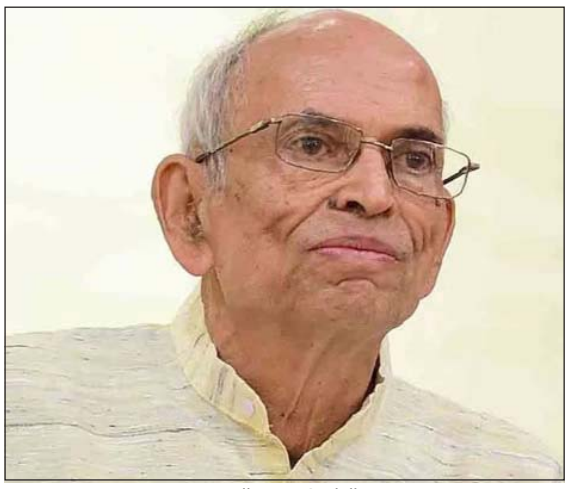
Economic systems shaped by late capitalism have a tendency to transform everything into a market. Our attention is bought and sold, our data is traded as currency, and our communities are repackaged as platforms for monetization. In this context, choices are not merely individual: they are engineered preferences, shaped by incentives that benefit the powerful and entrench systems of misogyny, hatred, and violence. These systems have powerfully coerced individuals into conforming to models that perpetuate gendered inequities and exclusion, cultural narratives that uphold dominance and fear,and public policies that reward aggression over justice. Church communities are not immune. Structures that should resist oppression sometimes replicate it - subtly, systemically, and with spiritual consequences.

IV. Reclaiming Church as a Powerful Space to embrace shared Life in Christ

In the midst of these forces, the Christ-centred community offers a counter-narrative - not just an alternative opinion, but a living way of being. This narrative pulses with life which is rooted in the Christ who invites us to choose not what is easy, but what is life-affirming. In Jesus, choices are not commodified options; rather they are invitations into deeper union with God and neighbour. The early church spoke truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), modelling conversations where vulnerability meets grace. In a world that allures us into hate and violence subtly encoded in our digital space, Christ invites the Church to shape communities where listening matters, humility is prized, and dialogue becomes a sacrament of reconciling presence. In Christ's body, people are not consumers - they are beloved members. The logic of the kingdom subverts market reductionism; the "least" are prized, the oppressed are heard, and relationship, not transaction, defines identity.

Choices, Conversations, Community - these are not abstract themes but the living fibres of discipleship. In a time when digital forces pull us toward solitude in crowds, Christ calls us into communion. When we follow the crucified and risen One, we rediscover - Choices rooted in love, not coercion; Conversations shaped by truth and grace; and Community that reflects God's own life. In this emergent way - the incarnate, communal, hope-filled life of Christ - we find resistance to systems of hatred and violence, and a pathway into a more joyful, just, and shared future. ●

Madhav D. Gadgil Passes Away
Heartfelt Condolence



Madhav D. Gadgil

We mourn with deep sorrow the passing away of Madhav D. Gadgil, one of India's most eminent ecologists and a prophetic voice for ecological justice. His life and work profoundly reshaped the way our nation understands the relationship between nature, people, and development. Rooted in scientific rigor and moral courage, his vision consistently affirmed that ecological integrity and human well-being are inseparable.

Professor Gadgil will be remembered with particular respect for his courageous leadership of the **Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel** and the landmark *Gadgil Committee Report*. At a time when ecological concerns were often marginalised in the name of unchecked development, he spoke with rare clarity and integrity. He called for the protection of the Western Ghats—one of the world's most fragile biodiversity hotspots—through people-centred, decentralised, and ecologically responsible approaches, firmly grounded in justice and sustainability.

The **Church of South India (CSI)** takes particular pride in affirming that we openly support the Gadgil Committee Report. This stance arose from the CSI's long-standing commitment to creation care and ecological justice, and from the conviction that safeguarding nature is an essential expression of Christian faith. Standing with Prof. Gadgil was not merely a policy decision, but a theological and moral witness — affirming that the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor must be heard together.

Prof. Gadgil's vision resonates deeply with the CSI's ecological journey: reverence for biodiversity, community participation, decentralised governance, and a development paradigm rooted in justice, restraint, and sustainability. His legacy continues to inspire the Church's climate justice ministries, ecological education, and advocacy for the protection of life in all its diversity.

We extend our heartfelt condolences to his family, colleagues, students, and all who were inspired by his wisdom and courage. May his life and legacy continue to guide India and the global community towards a future that honours the Earth as a shared and sacred responsibility.

With gratitude, respect, and hope,

Rt. Rev. Dr. Royce Manoj Victor

Bishop-in-Charge, Kerala State, CSI Ecological Concerns

Rt. Rev. Dr. Malayil Sabu Koshy Cherian

Bishop, CSI Madhya Kerala Diocese

Prof. Dr. Mathew Koshy Punnackadu

Environmental Advisor, CSI Synod

Commissioner for Climate Justice and Sustainable Development, WCC

LWF staff from multi-purpose cash assistance centers across Poland, established to support Ukrainian refugees, gather in Bytom in October 2022 for training in community-based psychosocial support.
Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

Please read the report on pages 1 & 8

cheerchat

The love of family and the admiration of friends are much more important than wealth and privilege.

– Charles Kurait

THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

Poland: Model for churches and humanitarian actors working hand in hand

LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Anne Burghardt reiterated the LWF approach in her message delivered during the official closing ceremony attended by church leaders, staff and refugee representatives... "Despite uncertainty and many challenges, together we built something meaningful and lasting. Rarely in our history have we seen such a wide-reaching humanitarian response emerge so quickly - the fruit of our shared witness as one LWF family. Through this experience, we understood in a very tangible way what holistic mission truly means: when service, theology, and advocacy come together as one coherent expression of faith and solidarity."

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learning, and integration activities.

This response was never only about delivering assistance. It was about restoring dignity, building trust, and standing alongside people at a moment of profound loss,

The Lutheran church was among the first to provide such emergency services. Volunteers organized soup kitchens and transport, while parish facilities and private homes of congregation members became temporary houses for the refugees.

LWF Program Executive for Member Church Projects Rebekka Meissner recalls the initial fact-finding visit to the Polish Ukrainian border. **"We encountered long lines of very tired, exhausted and incredibly sad women, a few grandmothers but mostly mothers with young children, being met by the generosity and enthusiasm of volunteers."**

The experience in Poland reaffirmed a core humanitarian lesson: local faith actors are often the first to respond and the last to remain. Before any humanitarian agencies arrived on the ground, ECACP had set up its own refugee response. Among the services provided by the churches were transport and safe spaces for the refugees, in particular the vulnerable women and children who were at risk of falling into the hands of predators. "Churches are very well connected, so they knew where the refugees were, and they acted quickly," says Calma, "Other humanitarian organizations, including United Nations (UN) agencies, followed the lead of our member church in identifying refugee concentrations and directing humanitarian assistance accordingly."

As the war intensified and the numbers of refugees rose, World Service joined this effort, as the church's capacity for support was stretched by its own response and preparations for the 2023 Thirteenth LWF Assembly in Kraków.

ECACP Presiding Bishop Jerzy Samiec expressed gratitude for "the openness and generosity of the global Lutheran communion" in supporting the joint refugee response. "Refugees who have been forced to flee from the war are in very difficult physical, emotional, material and psychological conditions," he noted. "When we accept them in Poland, we should provide assistance in all these spheres. In our homes, we show them understanding, support and love. But we are also aware that they need finances to live, which is why the multipurpose cash assistance project is so important and timely," he said.

Looking back at the last three-and-a-half years, the LWF Poland country team leader, Dr Iwona Baraniec, reiterated the impact of the work with Ukrainian refugees. "We are ending our activities with the belief that we have provided real help and equipped people with new tools that will make it easier for them to function independently in the country," she said. "We met people who suddenly found themselves in difficult life circumstances. We gave them hope and showed them that no one is alone in this situation," she added.

Over 70 percent of the staff working for LWF were refugees themselves, giving them a sense of purpose in difficult circumstances, as well as strengthening the response that the centers could provide. "I had to leave my home, my job [....] I was forced to leave my country to protect my children," said Olga, who worked in a state bank in Odessa before the war and had been assisting internally displaced people from the Donbass region since 2014. She stressed that as a refugee, she had the best understanding of the situation facing the people that LWF was supporting. At the same time, being able to work helped her and her family, not only financially: "This job makes me feel needed," Olga said.

– LWI News

People's Reporter
A FORUM OF CURRENT AFFAIRS

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